

was no viable 'exit strategy' we could see, violating another of our principles. Furthermore, we had been self-consciously trying to set a pattern for handling aggression in the post-Cold War world. Going in and occupying Iraq, thus unilaterally exceeding the United Nations' mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression that we hoped to establish." President Bush the first wrote in 1998.

"Had we gone the invasion route, the United States would conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land. It would have been a dramatically different, and perhaps barren, outcome." Those are the words that President Bush, Sr. wrote only 5 years ago, 4 years before his son led an attack on Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, those letters from constituents that I have discussed night after night here were particularly compelling, especially some letters I got from the families of men and women who are serving in Iraq. And a couple of weeks ago I met in Akron, the largest city in my district, with 25 families who have loved ones in Iraq; and they talked about our failure, the Bush administration's failure, to support the troops, to supply the troops, to protect the troops: not enough safe drinking water, either bottled water or purification facilities, not enough antibiotics. Soldiers and sailors had to pay for their trips home, pay for their airfare. Some soldiers were actually charged by the hospital, had to pay the hospital for their food when they were recovering. And some soldiers, about one fourth of them, we are told, do not have the body armor which will protect their lives.

So on the one hand, these families said to me, our letters from constituents said to me, we have \$300 million a week going to private contractors to do work that is not really very well accounted for. On the other hand, we have our soldiers simply not being protected, not enough safe drinking water, not enough body armor, not enough antibiotics. And I would hope that President Bush would have listened to his father, which he clearly did not, from his father's words, but would begin to listen to some of my constituents and other constituents who beg him to focus on protecting and supplying the troops with a little less focus on all these unbid contracts and the corruption that this has brought and the waste of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars that we are seeing literally every week in Iraq.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. MCCOTTER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MCCOTTER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

SUPPORTING THE VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, next week is November 11. And often, I believe, in this Chamber we pay lip service to our veterans; and we fail to deliver on solid votes and programs that would better demonstrate our recognition of their sacrifice and service. And this year, unfortunately with the budget and the appropriations passed, is no exception.

I was astonished earlier today when a colleague from the Republican majority stood up to pretend to document how great things are for our veterans, all these new services and things we are providing. I am hearing a very different assessment from my veterans and their dependents. And facts are stubborn things.

Here are some real facts, unlike what we heard earlier today: 150,000 veterans are waiting 6 months or longer for appointments; 14,000 veterans have been waiting 15 months or longer for their "expedited" disability claims; 560,000 disabled veterans are subject to the disabled veterans tax, something we have tried to rectify.

We have 373 cosponsors. There are only 435 people here. If 373 people want something, we should be able to do it, should we not? That is a super, super, super majority. But guess what. The Republican leadership, under urging from the President and Secretary Rumsfeld and threats of veto from the President, are refusing to bring up a repeal of the disabled veterans tax.

We can have tax breaks for people who do not work for a living, the investor class. We can have tax breaks for whole hosts of people and things. But we cannot have tax relief for disabled veterans. Is that not extraordinary? President Bush refused to spend \$275 million in emergency money for veterans health care provided by Congress in the fiscal year 2002 supplemental appropriations bill. But of course he wants to do everything he can to recognize the service of our veterans and our young men and women.

January 8 of this year, the Bush administration cut off VA health care for 164,000 veterans. They put them in a new category called Category 8. They are wealthy veterans just like the wealthy people they are giving tax breaks to. Well, not quite. The wealthy people the Bush administration is raining tax breaks on earn over \$311,000 a year. But these vets are wealthy. They do not deserve that veterans health care, according to the Bush administration. They earn \$25,000 a year. They should pay for their own health care.

The President's budget also proposed doubling the prescription drug copayment from \$7 to \$15 for veterans, the ones who are still able to qualify, and a \$250 enrollment fee on another category, Category 7 and 8. These could be people with low incomes, distinguished

service, but under the Bush administration, we just cannot quite afford to give them the service we promised when they enlisted.

Now we either believe in the all-volunteer military or we do not. And we are either going to recognize the sacrifice and service of veterans or we will not. And if we do not, probably the next generation is not going to want to enlist for what is a very tough and today very bloody and dangerous job because they are not quite sure of the promise that we will take care of them and we will take care of their families and their dependents.

A few other problems. Rather than funding the VA, the Bush administration sent a memo to regional VA facilities that forbid Veterans Administration employees from proactively informing veterans about the services available to them in order to reduce the number of veterans using VA facilities.

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That is supportive. Is that not great?

In March, House Republicans voted in favor of their budget resolution that cut \$14 billion, "B" billion dollars, from mandatory veterans benefits over 10 years, including veterans pensions, education and other benefits. That was an hour after we voted to support the troops in Iraq.

Maybe it would have been a better message if we just had not bothered with the words, but had duly voted for the money. But, no, the Republican majority, pushed by President Bush, could not vote for that money, and that budget passed by one vote.

The House Republican budget resolution also cut \$14 billion from veterans health care and other discretionary veterans programs. The Republican budget also included the President's proposal to impose a \$250 enrollment fee on our veterans for the free health care that they were promised.

The Republican budget also included the President's proposal to double the prescription drug copayment from \$7 to \$15. The President had already raised it from \$2 to \$7, but, hey, we need money. We have got to send a lot of money over to Iraq, and we cannot ask them to pay any of it back, so we have to double the prescription drug benefit fee for our veterans.

Now, the House VA-HUD appropriations bill funded VA at the level requested by the President, which was \$1.8 billion below the House Republicans' own budget, and it was \$3.3 billion below the level requested by national veterans organizations in their independent budget proposal.

Let us really celebrate Veterans' Day, and give them the services they earned and need, and pay for them.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) is recognized for 5 minutes.